

# Donovan, Marcuse, Schlesinger, Julia Child & Co.

CPYRGHT  
OSS  
*The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency*  
By R. Harris Smith  
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By DAVID WISE

WHAT COULD Clark MacGregor, Herbert Marcuse, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Julia Child, Benjamin Welles, Pope Paul VI, S. Dillon Ripley, Sterling Hayden, and David Bruce possibly have in common? Or, for that matter, John Gardner, Frank Schoonmaker, the wine connoisseur, SEC chairman William Casey, Douglass Cater, Henry Ringling North of the circus family, Merian Cooper, director of the film *King Kong*, John Oakes, editor of *The New York Times* editorial page, and Arthur Goldberg?

Answer: all formerly toiled for the Office of Strategic Services, better known as the OSS, the World War II cloak-and-dagger agency that, for better or worse, became the forerunner of today's Central Intelligence Agency.

To get right to the point, in OSS, R. Harris Smith, who served briefly as a research analyst for CIA and then fled to become a political scientist in California, has written the best book about America's first modern secret service. Others have told of their own exploits in General William J. Donovan's colorful, chaotic spy agency; Corey Ford has provided an interesting portrait of Donovan himself, and Allen Dulles, in *The Secret Surrender*, detailed the story of his successful negotiations leading to the surrender of the German army in Italy. But R. Harris Smith has put it all together and added a great deal more.

No matter that he calls the CIA "the most misunderstood bureaucracy of the American government," for perhaps Smith wishes to keep his friends who still toil invisibly across the river in Langley, Virginia. No matter that the "full" story of OSS cannot be written unless and until CIA unlocks the wartime files of OSS, which it still has squirreled away out there.

For all of that, Smith, combining the style of a journalist with the scholarly

approach of the political scientist, has provided an excellent overview of the role of OSS during the two-front war against Nazi Germany and imperial Japan. He has woven together the richest material from dozens of existing memoirs, books and articles about OSS, all carefully footnoted, but in addition, he has performed prodigious original research, interviewing or corresponding with some 150 former members of OSS,

many of whom, apparently, could hardly stop talking.

The chapter on the OSS's dealings with Ho Chi Minh is especially illuminating. As is well known, an OSS medic saved Ho's life in 1945, and as the war drew to a close, OSS officers maneuvered to aid the Viet Minh against waning French colonial power in Indochina. It was not to be, for Washington would not allow it; but at least briefly, the United States was supporting, in Vietnam, what Dean Rusk liked to call "the other side." And Smith notes that Peter Dewey, a young OSS colonel, was the first American to die in Vietnam; the date was September 26, 1945.

"Wild Bill" Donovan's OSS, created with Franklin D. Roosevelt's backing, brought together what surely must have been the most diverse group of spies ever to gather under one cloak for a common purpose. Upper-class WASPS, the adenoidal scions of America's great banking and industrial families, mingled with Communists and crooks, labor leaders and professors—there were a lot of professors—in a bouillabaisse that might have been whipped up by Mrs. Child herself.

And it is the names—the astonishing list of names—that form the strength of Smith's work, even more than the individual episodes of OSS derring-do or failure. With the aid of a special system of footnotes, Smith not only reveals dozens of names but tells us where they are now.

Some of the OSS operators had found their life's calling. Smith makes it clear that the top echelons of the CIA, past and present, were former OSS men, and, scattered through the pages, they are named—Allen Dulles and Richard Helms, who became directors of CIA, Thomas Karamessines, Larry Houston, Tracy Barnes, Lyman Kirkpatrick Jr., John Bross, Alfred Ulmer Jr., and William Colby, all of whom became station chiefs or top officials of the intelligence agency. Others with wonderful reversible names, like DeWitt Poole, Preston Goodfellow,

and Whitney Shepardson, moved out into the universities, the foundations, the banks, and corporations, where many of them could be relied upon to carry water for "the Agency" when asked. Some of these names showed up on the boards of foundations and other CIA conduits two decades later, for they had not forgotten the old ties that bind. Tracing the names, the half-submerged links between the intelligence community and what Richard Rovere has called the American Establishment, is what makes Smith's book so fascinating and valuable.

In a final chapter, Smith accurately points out that there were, and are, many liberals in the CIA, but his effort to portray the Agency as the Virginia chapter of the ADA is not entirely convincing, particularly since Smith himself argues that over the years, "The Agency's covert power was consistently exercised on behalf of political repression and dictatorship." And Smith notes that a dynamic wartime secret service may lead, in peacetime, "to irreparable disaster."

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